



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Towards a greater understanding of the
construction of the funerary monument of
Sir John Montagu, St Edmund's Church,
Warkton, Northamptonshire**

Towards a greater understanding of the construction of the funerary monument of Sir John Montagu, St Edmund's Church, Warkton, Northamptonshire

Iain Soden BA MIfA

Summary

Conservation of the monument to Sir John Montagu involved its temporary dismantling, revealing a carefully-constructed stone frame behind, but created using whatever re-useable stonework came to hand. Probable elements of the earlier chancel were included which could not be used elsewhere or were simply left over from the 18th-century chancel rebuilding.

Introduction

St Edmund's Church, Warkton, Northamptonshire, is a medieval parish church serving the village and parish of Warkton (NGR: SP 893 798; Fig 1). Sir Niklaus Pevsner (1990, 442) notes that it is not a particularly attractive church (!) but draws attention to a Perpendicular west tower and the chancel (Fig 2). The chancel was totally redesigned and rebuilt in the mid-18th century to house the funerary monuments of the Dukes of Montagu/Buccleuch and is a very notable alteration, with little being apparent of its medieval precursor (Fig 3). The rest of the church was restored in 1868, but for two late 12th-century aisle bays.



Fig 1: Location of St Edmunds Church (arrowed).
Contains ©Ordnance Survey data Database right 2014

Behind the funerary monument of Sir John Montagu



Fig 2: St Edmund's, approach to the south porch and aisle



Fig 3: The 18th-century chancel, looking west

Within the mid-18th century rebuilt chancel of St Edmund's are four funerary/tomb monuments, dated between 1752 and 1827 '*placed in apsed niches to the left and right, two on either side. The first two were filled first. They contain two of Roubilliac's masterpieces, John Duke of Montagu, 1752 on the left, and Mary, Duchess of Montagu, 1753 on the right*'. Footnote: It is said that the antiquarian Martin Folkes helped to design Duke John's monument. (Pevsner and Cherry 1990, 442).

L F Roubiliac (1702-62) was a French-born sculptor who learnt some of his trade as a modeller at the Chelsea porcelain factory. Although he subsequently produced many fine busts and other sculptures, he became chiefly known for funerary monuments of which there are a number in Northamptonshire, including Warkton and Southwick. His work is reckoned by scholars to be among the finest examples of the type.

Pevsner and Cherry (ibid, 442-3) relate the following about the first monument (the earliest), which is the subject of the current recording and the present report:

Duke John's monument, ready in the model in 1749, and in stone in 1752, has as its centre a big structure of indeterminate shape somewhat like a Rococo pottery stove. On its ledge lies a large putto-boy, his hands busy hanging up an oval medallion with the profile of the duke. To the right, on the base, stands Charity, with two children, her arm stretched up to help him. One of the children is weeping and holding an extinguished torch. To the left, on the ground, that is yet lower down, the Duchess with his coronet and shield of arms. The composition thus has the typical Rococo zigzag movement into space, a scheme equally characteristic of Boucher and Tiepolo. Behind to the left and right, projecting from the upper part of the structure, a gun barrel and cannon balls and a big flag and the trumpet of fame.

The recent dismantling and cleaning of Roubiliac's monument for John Duke of Montagu gave rise to a first-time viewing of the body of the monument, the mass of undecorated stonework which forms the hidden base and core of the visible marble front. It was decided by the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust that this opportunity proffered a chance to best appreciate and understand the assembly and presentation of the monument as the sculptor intended in 1749-52 and how he might have chosen and deployed the materials at his disposal on which to mount what Pevsner calls a 'masterpiece'.

Behind the funerary monument of Sir John Montagu

Accordingly, Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd (IS Heritage) and The Digital Building Heritage Group at De Montfort University (Dr Douglas Cawthorne and Jonathan Gration) were asked by the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust to make appropriate records of the monument core once it had been cleaned of dirt, dust and extraneous loose stonework but before it was re-assembled.

All work was carried out within the sealed-off environment of the church chancel/mausoleum, where the space had been set aside as a mason's lodge/conservation workshop.

Methodology

It was intended to produce a mixture of records of the exposed monument core, before it was re-covered. These were:

- Drawn records - A digital scan of the monument core using a digital point-cloud scanner (De Montfort University)
- Written records – Free-text notes worked up into a report (IS Heritage)
- Photographic records – Digital media (for reporting) and Black and White negative with related contact sheet (for archiving) (IS Heritage)

The report is designed to present the records of the work in a manner which meets the requirements of English Heritage Level 2 historic building recording, felt to be appropriate for the rather amorphous stonework of the monument core (EH 2006). There was no intention to dismantle the core or to make any changes which might have a deleterious effect on the sculptor's original intention. It is, rather, an opportunistic approach, of not missing an opportunity to better understand the work, since it may not need further conservation for many generations.

The monument itself was carefully dis-assembled piece by piece, each element set aside carefully in the chancel, which had been sealed off from the nave and set up as a mason's lodge specifically for the purpose. A steel gantry supporting a high-level viewing platform and a sliding mount for a block and tackle provided the means to remove the heaviest pieces and carefully separate them from the core. These were then set aside for cleaning within the chancel area before eventual re-assembly.

The monument core was manually cleaned. Extraneous stonework was taken out and set aside for study as appropriate, while any degraded elements to the core were provided with block-work props in the interim, before reassembly using appropriate matching mortars.

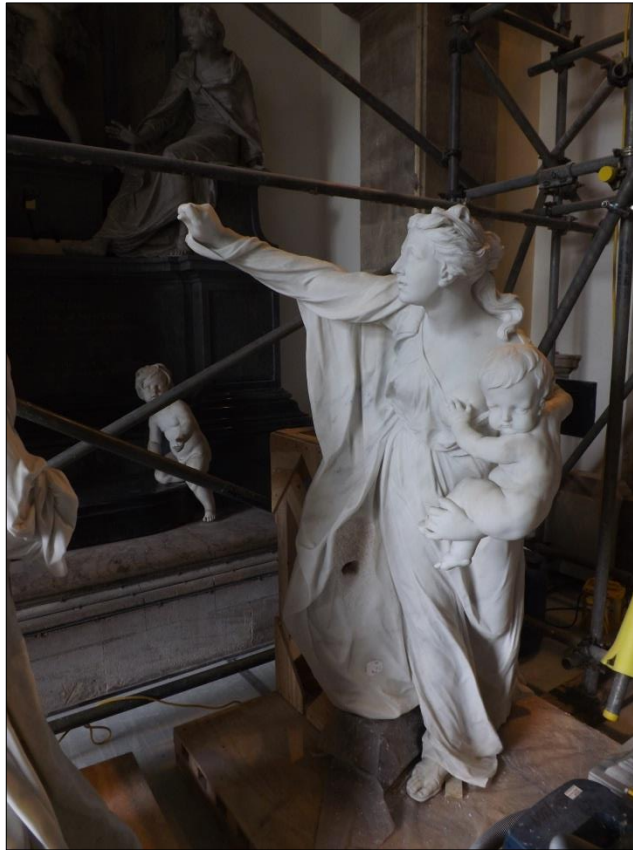


Fig 4: Part of the monument, dis-assembled and set aside for cleaning, pending reinstatement

Observations

The entire core of the monument is made up of local limestone, re-used from other origins, and almost certainly left over when the chancel was rebuilt in the 1740s. This re-used material has been largely (but not entirely) re-mortared and built as a frame to support the different marble elements of the monument. A few left-over pieces, principally thirteen architectural fragments, had not been re-mortared but were incorporated as loose items within deliberate voids in the core.

The core is made up of five distinct stages which relate to the elements of the monument itself. Beginning at the base (1) and working upwards, these are as follows:

1. Polygonal base, of rubble, incorporating re-used architectural fragments, projecting out 1m from the chancel wall, and just over 2m across.
2. A slightly narrower table finished with flat but not polished slabs, shaped, 852mm from floor.
3. A narrower superstructure of stone 'pylons' or columns, supporting an upper mass of stonework, and resembling a haphazard 'entablature'. Top 2370mm from floor.
4. The exposed ashlar of the chancel wall, to which the monument is affixed directly; partly plastered. The eaves of the former chancel can be seen as the uppermost course of stonework. At 3750mm from floor.

Behind the funerary monument of Sir John Montagu

5. Brickwork, to which the stone plume of the monument is attached; this extended the original chancel wall upwards and changed the chancel proportions completely.

Each of these distinct build-elements can be seen in the Figure below, numbered. The total height of the monument core, and the mounting scars up to and including those of the plume on the added brickwork, is 4.85m.

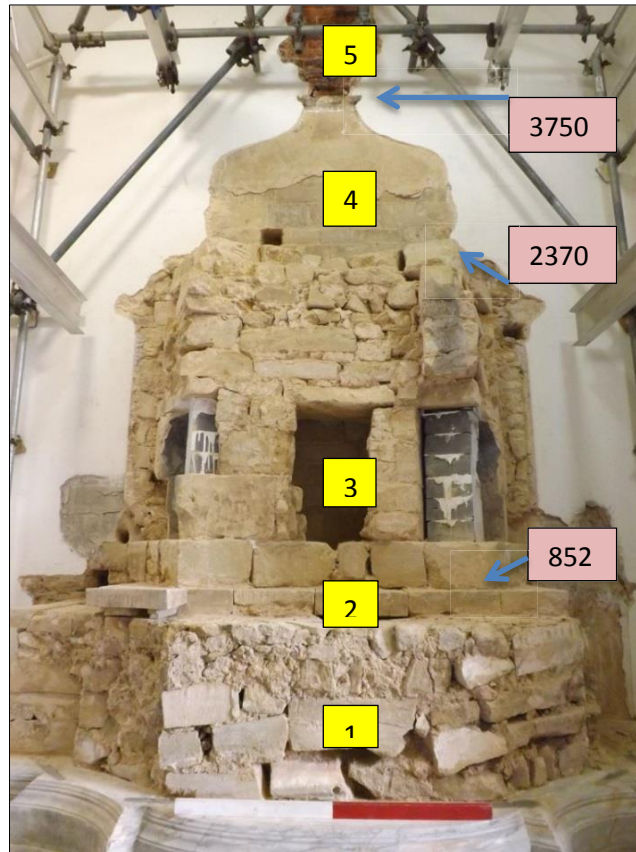


Fig 5: The monument core, viewed at eye-level for the onlooker; scale 1m. Measured dimensions in millimetres from the floor are added.

The third stage of the structure, involving the use of pylons or haphazard columns of stone, preserves a large deliberate void in the centre of the core. This had simply been packed with loose rubble (of which more below). At the rear and base of the void lies the apex of an arch, barely visible, but which appears to have been blocked prior to the monument being constructed. Some of the blocking mortar at the apex has either perished or been omitted (Fig 6).

The spring of this arch can be clearly seen behind the monument low down on its right (Fig 7), including a number of voussoirs. The blocking has settled very slightly, cracking at the join. The monument is constructed in such a way that the left hand springer cannot be seen as easily, but a vertical butt joint is postulated at the edge of the current monument.

This view is not ideal, but enough is visible to postulate a blocked four-centred arch behind the monument, which may have been a former tomb-canopy in the north chancel wall. How it now relates to the added later Montagu family vault beyond (to the north) is unclear, no better view being afforded by the current works.



Fig 6: The monument core viewed from the dismantling gantry above; scale 1m. The apex of a low, flat arch hidden behind the monument is arrowed. The eastern spring of that same arch (on the far right here) can be seen in detail in the Figure below.

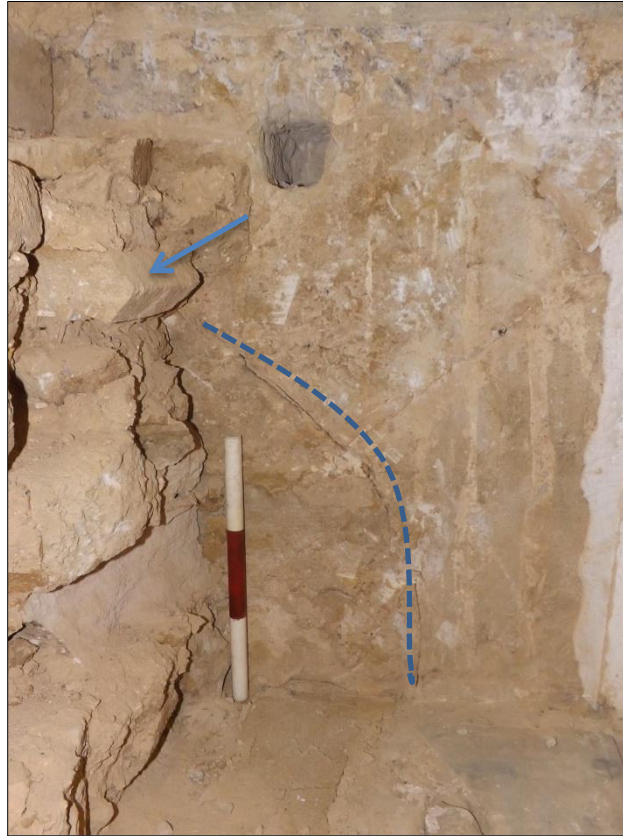


Fig 7: Spring of an arch behind the monument core; scale 300mm. Note a built-in architectural fragment to top left (arrowed)

The deliberate void which characterises the third stage of the monument core was packed with loose stones including twelve very damaged fragments of worked or architectural stonework. These comprised:

- Two curved hood-mould fragments from around a door or window, including one with label stop
- Three splay fragments
- One lozenge mullion fragment
- One cavetto moulded mullion fragment with glazing groove
- One cavetto intersection from window tracery
- One fragment of cavetto tracery with small integral blind cusp
- Three fragments of classically-inspired cyma recta with bead

Further, battered fragments had also been incorporated into the monument core, perhaps suggesting that the loose ones were the leftovers of the leftovers, merely placed where they would not be seen and where they could be disposed of. All are items which derive from windows and in some cases doorways, which derive from the medieval church, probably of the 14th or 15th centuries. They are in poor condition and do not add anything to our understanding of the medieval church, since it cannot be certain where they come from. While the chancel is the obvious place, this is not certain. All of the windows in the present aisles of the present church were restored in the 19th

Behind the funerary monument of Sir John Montagu

century, and despite medieval forms, have mullion profiles which are different from those found. Only the hood mould has a similar example, to be found on the 15th-century west window of the tower (Fig 8).



Fig 8a and 8b: Hood mould with label stop, and equivalent piece on St Edmund's tower; scale 300mm.

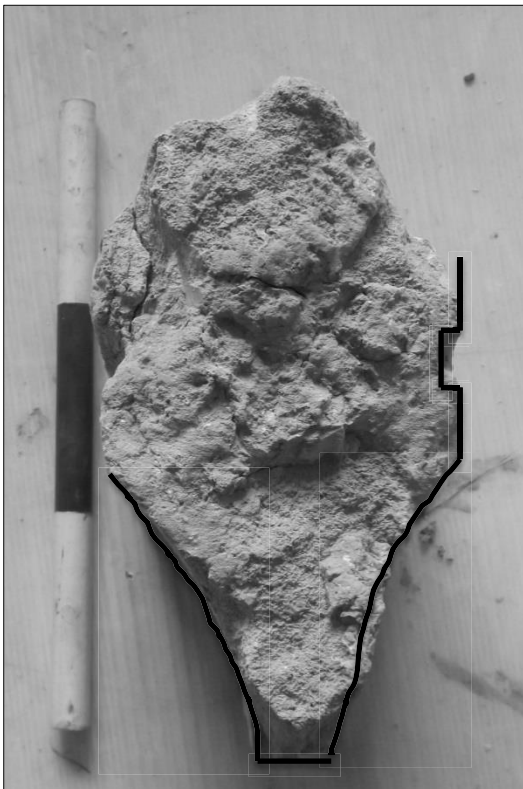


Fig 9: Battered 14th-15th century cavetto mullion with glazing groove; scale 300mm



Fig 10: a better-preserved 14th-15th century cavetto mullion fragment still built into Stage 1 of the monument core (arrowed); scale 300mm

The fragments have been retained on site.

Behind the funerary monument of Sir John Montagu

Conclusions

While L F Roubiliac is renowned for the quality of his sculptural pieces, the unseen core of this particular much-celebrated sepulchral monument is made of the poorest local limestone pieces, re-used and which had probably been left over when the chancel was rebuilt and an above-ground northern sepulchre added for the family vault on the outside.

This core utilised some of the pieces, including architectural fragments, which would have been left over when the best pieces had been incorporated into the new chancel. Thus they represent architecturally the bottom of the pile and include elements from one or more windows and door openings, which would have been unusable anywhere except as core-work. Much of the re-used material is medieval in origin.

The expense and undoubted high quality of Roubilliac's 'masterpiece' sculpture did not extend to what could not be seen.

The core of the monument appears to mask a low, flat arch, perhaps four-centred, which may mark the location of a former tomb-canopy in the chancel wall, probably related to the medieval holders of the church's advowson (the right to present the vicar), the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. Such a monastic-inspired tomb-canopy would have become irrelevant at the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 and its replacement soon after would not have been uncommon; not least here where the Montagu's were given the former monastic advowson by the Crown. It is not clear whether this arch was blocked to accept the current monument or whether this constitutes an earlier blocking. The Northamptonshire county historian, John Bridges, may have seen the arch when he made his field notes c1720-25 (although his work was not edited and published until 1791). However, his edited, published work notes the chancel with the beginnings of the current array of sepulchral monuments (1791, I: 263-5).

Bibliography

Bridges J, 1791 *History and antiquities of Northamptonshire*

Pevsner, Sir N, and Cherry, B, 1990 *The buildings of England: Northamptonshire*



IS Heritage, 24 June 2014